

Sowerby Bridge High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107563
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	309433
Inspection dates	2–3 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Josephine Nowacki HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	840
6th form	117
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Phil Townend
Headteacher	Ms Kate Wood
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 1998
School address	Albert Road Sowerby Bridge West Yorkshire HX6 2NW
Telephone number	01422 831011
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sowerby Bridge High School is an average-sized comprehensive, situated on the outskirts of Halifax. A high proportion of students come from areas of social and economic deprivation. Approximately 40% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, predominantly Pakistani, although there are increasing numbers from eastern European backgrounds. The number of students who speak English as an additional language is more than three times higher than the national average. The majority of students entering school at Year 7 have reached standards that are below the national average. The number of students, including those in the sixth form, who are entitled to free school meals is much higher than that found nationally. At the time of the inspection, the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (including those with statements of special educational need) was well above average. There is a higher proportion of boys than girls in most year groups.

Sowerby Bridge High School has held specialist status in mathematics and computing since 2006. It is the only school within Calderdale authority with specialist provision for students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and hearing impairment.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Sowerby Bridge High school is an improving and inclusive school which provides a satisfactory education for students aged 11 to 16. Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, the efficiency and effectiveness of the sixth form is inadequate.

The headteacher has a clear vision and commitment to improving the life chances of students. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of most of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. A number of actions have been put in place, including better use of data, and these are beginning to have a positive impact. Current standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Achievement in Key Stage 3 is improving. In Key Stage 4, there is a rising trend in the number of students who achieve five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above. However, the school recognises that it still has some way to go and that further improvement is still needed, especially in the sixth form. Significant staffing difficulties have impeded more rapid progress in some areas. Capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Staff at the school work hard to provide a calm and welcoming environment in which students say they feel safe. Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most students enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to learning. Despite the school's rigorous monitoring of attendance, it remains satisfactory because of a small cohort of students with persistent absence. Behaviour is satisfactory and improving. The care and support provided for all students are strengths of the school. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including ASD and hearing impairment, receive good support. However, care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall because systems for setting challenging targets and monitoring students' progress are not fully embedded and effective in all areas of the school.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is a significant proportion of good teaching, and this is leading to rising standards. The school is aware of the need to increase this amount of good and better teaching in order to raise standards still further. The curriculum is satisfactory. Recent revisions to the curriculum have increased the range of options to make it better suited to the needs of all students, but it is too soon to assess the full impact of this.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The school judges the effectiveness of the sixth form to be satisfactory. Inspectors found it to be inadequate. Students are loyal to the sixth form; they speak very positively about their teachers and appreciate the individual support they receive. However, achievement and standards are unsatisfactory. Standards have improved but remain well below national average. The progress students make based on their prior attainment in Key Stage 4 varies from satisfactory to inadequate across subjects. Personal development is satisfactory and students gain in confidence. Teaching and learning are inadequate overall. In the main, this is because some teachers do not take sufficient account of the wide range of students' abilities and standards achieved in lessons are too low. The curriculum lacks breadth and consequently too few students are attracted to or retained in the sixth form. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The newly appointed and very able head of sixth form has quickly grasped the issues and has set a very clear agenda to tackle weaknesses.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the amount of good and better teaching in order to raise standards and improve achievement more quickly, especially in English.
- Be more consistent in the setting of challenging targets and the quality of advice given to students.
- Raise standards and improve achievement in the sixth form.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. Standards attained by students at the end of Year 11 have shown steady improvement since the last inspection and are average.

In 2007, standards achieved by the end of Year 9 were below national expectations for English, mathematics and science although the school met its targets. Standards in science have remained static and in English they have declined slightly; students make satisfactory progress overall in these subjects. Results in mathematics, however, show a clear upward trend from the last inspection and students make good progress.

The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above is rising steadily, although it remains below national averages. However, when GCSE English and mathematics are included, the proportion of students achieving five high grade passes in 2007 declined and remains lower than national average. Results in English show a declining trend since the last inspection. Positive features in 2007 were the increase in the number of students who left school with at least one pass at GCSE level and results in information and communication technology (ICT), double award science, physical education and English literature, which were at or near the national average. Nevertheless, between the ages of 11 and 16, students underachieved in 2007 and most, including those from Pakistani backgrounds, did not make the progress they could. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

The school acknowledges that there have been difficulties, especially in staffing, and that although standards and achievement are below national averages, they have reason to be optimistic. Inspectors agree; school data show encouraging signs that standards and progress have improved in the current year and are satisfactory overall and good in some areas. Students' work seen during the inspection confirms this position.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The personal development and well-being of students are satisfactory. Most learners enjoy coming to school and many participate in a range of sporting activities and visits abroad. Behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory and improving because of effective monitoring, a range of interventions and a culture which rewards positive behaviour. Most

students say they feel safe because they know that staff will listen to them if they wish to discuss any problems. Any incidents of bullying and racial harassment are dealt with swiftly. The school has rigorous systems for monitoring attendance and most students attend regularly. However, attendance remains below average because of persistent absence by a small cohort of students.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students demonstrate a social conscience and good relationships when working together in charity and fundraising activities. They are aware of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise and eating healthily. Students make positive contributions to the community by taking an active role in the school council and undertaking local environmental projects. Opportunities to engage in a successful work experience programme contribute satisfactorily to learners' future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The quality of teaching and learning for students aged 11 to 16 is satisfactory with a significant amount that is good. The school knows that it needs to increase the amount that is good or better to bring about the more rapid improvement in standards to which it aspires.

The strengths of teaching and learning are in the students' enjoyment and engagement in their lessons, especially when they are involved and participating in practical tasks. In mathematics, ICT and physical education in particular, questioning techniques are used successfully to draw out the students' thoughts and views as well as checking what they have learned. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar, satisfactory progress to that of their classmates. This is because their needs are clearly identified and then supported appropriately by the class teacher or learning assistant.

In the less effective lessons, there is often a lack of clarity about objectives and students are not sure exactly what to do or why they are doing it. Tasks are routine and often over-reliant on text book exercises and worksheets. There is less opportunity for students to become involved; levels of challenge and expectations are lower. In the best lessons, teachers use information about students' current standards to plan lessons, ensure that work is well matched to students' needs and that they understand what is required. However, this practice is not fully embedded across all subjects. Recent revisions to the assessment policy have resulted in improvements in the quality of written feedback to students. However, the school recognises that further work needs to be done to ensure greater consistency of assessment practice across all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The curriculum is satisfactory with a good range of courses in Key Stage 3. Recent changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum, designed to better meet the needs of individual students, includes a broader range of vocational courses. A small number of students also attend the local further education college, for some of their time, to pursue vocational training in hairdressing and

beauty therapy and construction. An alternative curriculum for a specific group of lower attaining students is aimed at improving employability and life skills. Provision is made to promote students' literacy skills across all subjects, but this is at an early stage of development. The citizenship programme is beginning to improve because new appointments have established a clear vision for future developments in this area. Although a full assessment of the revised curriculum will take longer, it is already bearing fruit: students are enjoying their new courses and there is a discernible improvement in achievement and behaviour.

A wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport, enhances students' experiences. Many subjects include field trips, residential and enrichment activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support for students are satisfactory. Arrangements for safeguarding are in place and meet statutory requirements. Pastoral care is a strong feature of the school because form tutors know their students well. Suitable systems support students' move from primary school into Year 7. Older students receive appropriate advice and guidance about subject choices and future options. Established systems and strong partnerships with external agencies provide effective support and guidance for students who have personal, family or behavioural problems. Support for vulnerable students and those with a hearing impairment and ASD is particularly good.

Recent strengthening of systems to monitor students' academic progress are beginning to be effective. However, the school is aware that there is still too much inconsistency of practice across the school, particularly in the setting of challenging targets and the quality of advice given to students about how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, which agrees with the school's view. The headteacher provides clear educational direction and this underpins the school's journey towards its longer term goals. She is well supported by an experienced and dedicated senior management team. Staff and leaders at all levels are positive and have a strong commitment to the school. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses; self-evaluation is broadly accurate, and identifies clearly the school's priorities and areas for improvement.

The school has systems in place to monitor and evaluate students' performance and, although these are resulting in improving standards, the school is aware that further work needs to be done to fully embed these systems. The process for checking the quality of teaching and learning is well established and understood by all staff. On occasion, too much emphasis is given to the structure and content of lessons rather than to assessing the impact that teaching has on students' learning and progress. Nevertheless, the amount of good teaching and learning has improved recently and this is having a positive impact on standards, especially in Key Stage 3.

Middle leaders are becoming effective and most have a clear understanding of their role as leaders, as well as managing improvements and the performance of staff in their own areas. The governing body is supportive of the school. They know the school's strengths and have an acute awareness of where improvement is needed. However, they often rely too heavily upon the advice of the senior staff when holding the school to account.

Developments resulting from the school's specialist status have been well managed and have led to improvements in standards, particularly in mathematics. The increased availability of computers and other electronic technology has had a positive impact across most teaching areas. However, the good practice to be found in mathematics and computing is not yet fully shared across other curriculum areas.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Sowerby Bridge High School, Sowerby Bridge, HX6 2NW

Thank you very much for welcoming us into your school during our recent inspection. We appreciate the time so many of you spent talking to us about your life and work at Sowerby Bridge High School. As a result of our visit, we have identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement which we have agreed with your headteacher.

The following is what we think are strengths of the school:

- your progress is improving in Key Stage 3 especially in mathematics where it is good
- the number of you gaining five grades at A* to C in GCSE is improving
- many of you enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to learning
- your behaviour is satisfactory and improving
- the senior leaders are making better use of data so they know how well you are doing
- the headteacher and her senior leaders, including the head of sixth form, have set clear priorities to improve your school further
- support for students with autistic spectrum disorder, hearing impairment and other additional needs is good;
- most of you attend well, although there is a small number of students whose attendance is a cause for concern.

What we've asked the school to do now is to:

- ensure lessons are consistently good so that you can all do your best
- ask all teachers to set you targets which stretch you and for them to let you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve
- develop the sixth form so that achievement and standards improve significantly.

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.